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SUBJECT: CANADIAN GOVERNMENT SURVIVES CONFIDENCE VOTE

REF: A. OTTAWA 719

[1](#)B. OTTAWA 709

[1](#)1. (U) The government of Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper on September 18 easily survived a confidence vote on a Ways and Means motion, with the unusual support of both the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the Bloc Quebecois. The Official Opposition Liberal Party voted en masse against the government for the first time in more than two years, reiterating its leader Michael Ignatieff's mantra that the party had indeed lost confidence in the government, while voicing support for the domestically popular home renovation tax credits in the motion. (The new Liberal line is that the motion was in fact unnecessary, since the credits had been in the 2009 budget, for which the Liberals had voted, unlike the NDP and the Bloc.)

[1](#)2. (U) The fight now moves to new legislation to expand benefits under Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) program, which the Conservatives introduced in the House of Commons on September 16. The Liberals moved on September 17 to obtain "unanimous consent" to expedite the legislation without the usual three readings and committee hearings in both the House and the Senate (the latter of which the Liberals control). House leaders from all four parties met on September 17 to discuss this possibility. Ultimately, both the NDP and the Bloc indicated some dissatisfaction with the new bill, claiming that it was not generous enough and still needed committee scrutiny and debate. Major labor union leaders have now begun to criticize the proposed provisions and scope of the bill as well. The NDP has nonetheless pledged to support the government until passage of revised EI legislation.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Comment: Parliament will recess during the week of September 21 in declared deference to the G-20 meetings that will again take PM Harper and other key ministers out of the country. The Liberals continue to voice hope that a consensus emerges that would enable a successful vote on EI before the end of the month, thus freeing the NDP from its temporary pledge of support for the government and therefore potentially enabling the Liberals successfully to introduce another vote of confidence on an Opposition Day o/a October

[1](#)1. These Parliamentary maneuvers are well off the radar scope for most Canadians, but Ottawa politicians remain riveted by the curious ebbs and flows of these short-term tactical alliances. The Canadian public continues to oppose yet another election by wide margins; the Conservatives say they don't want one, either (although they probably do, given more favorable poll numbers); the Liberals vow to topple the government (although their chances of winning an election are still slim, even if they would likely pick up some seats); the Bloc probably doesn't especially care one way or another, since it will likely maintain its four dozen seats); while the NDP probably fears an election the most, given weak polls and finances (although its core constituents will not countenance supporting the Conservatives even indirectly for long). Privately, some Conservatives are now beginning to predict survival of the government easily through the fall,

likely well past the 2010 Winter Olympics, and even possibly until even fall 2010. However, recent events demonstrate that the ongoing political roller coaster will most probably produce still more surprises that could undermine such newly optimistic calculations. The bottom line is that Canada will remain in virtual pre-election campaign mode for the foreseeable future, limiting the government's ability to pass Qforeseeable future, limiting the government's ability to pass significant legislation or to undertake bold policy choices.

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